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**Testimony of Douglas J. Monaghan, Chair
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**In SUPPORT of
SB 156, An Act Concerning Sibling Visitation
for Children in the Care and Custody of the Commissioner of Children and Families**

**Select Committee on Children
February 28, 2012**

The Connecticut Bar Association Child Welfare and Juvenile Law Section **supports** passage of SB 156. Under current law, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is required to ensure that a foster child has access to and visitation with his or her siblings throughout the duration of the child's placement. In reality, however, many foster children who are separated from their siblings do not have regular visitation and requests to facilitate such visits are frequently met with statements to the effect that there is a lack of case aids or other visitation resources.

The proposed legislation would require DCF to ensure, on average, weekly visitations between siblings unless this is not in the best interests of either sibling. It would further require DCF to document in the child's treatment plan why such weekly frequency is not in the child's best interests. To require a weekly baseline is absolutely necessary in that notwithstanding prior statutory mandate to provide regular visitation, DCF did not facilitate such visits. According to the testimony of Joan Kaufman, Ph.D. of Yale University School of Medicine, a majority of cases reviewed during the last federal Children & Family Service Review indicated that siblings had visitation less than twice a month "and one-third had no visitation with their siblings at all during the time period under review." Because DCF does not systematically track sibling visitation data, SB 156 also requires DCF to collect such data and report compliance.

The proposed legislation also requires DCF to draft a Sibling Bill of Rights in consultation with the Youth Advisory Boards in order to further protect relationships of siblings separated by the intervention of DCF. DCF supports this bill and includes in its testimony a Sibling Bill of Rights approved by the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioner and Directors in January 2012. For further insight into the importance of maintaining sibling relationships, see "Keeping Siblings Connected: A White Paper on Siblings in Foster Care and Adoptive Placements in New York State" (June 2007).

The passage of this legislation is clearly in the best interests of children whose lives have been the subject of the state's intervention and is consistent with the recommendations of health care providers who treat children who have suffered disruptions in their family unit.